

**REGARDING THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE RAISED BILL #5869:  
AN ACT CONCERNING AN INCREASE IN AID FOR  
AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMS**

Good afternoon. My name is William Davenport, and I have been teaching agriscience (formerly vocational agriculture) at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury for the past 20 years. I am also the director of the program and just finished recruiting 80 students for next year's freshman class. The dilemma I had was that we had over 150 applications of worthy candidates for those 80 spots. These students come from over 24 different cities and towns surrounding Region 14, ranging from Danbury, Bethel, Newtown and Bethany to Watertown, New Milford, Prospect and Naugatuck. We currently have a total of 305 students in the Ellis Clark Regional Agriscience and Technology program, which represents one third of the Nonnewaug High School population. Sounds like a magnet school, doesn't it? Students coming together from a variety of diverse backgrounds and locations to learn a specialty subject and pursue in-depth career training while attending a comprehensive high school!

15 years ago or so, when regional magnet schools first came into existence, it sounded like a new idea, a great way for students to learn while getting a jump start on their careers by receiving four years of career training during high school and then either continuing onto college with a competitive edge over their peers or moving directly into the workforce with the skills they need to succeed. Well, it wasn't such a new idea because vocational agriculture centers began in the 1920's, regionalized in the 1950's and have been flourishing ever since!

**I am here today to ask for your support of the Education Committee Raised Bill #5869**, which will increase state funding of these outstanding programs. Before 1993, these programs were fully funded by both tuition paid by sending towns and state reimbursement grants for operating costs. In 1993, the funding mechanism changed and a flat \$700.00 per student state operating grant was provided, and a tuition cap was created to ease the burden on sending towns. Now, 13 years later, the state-set tuition rate is \$7,992.00 and the state operating grant is now funded at only \$1,355.00 per student. **State support for the operating costs of these successful programs has not been significantly increased in the past 13 years, while other school choice programs have had major funding increases each year over the same time period.** My question is simply this: what makes us any different than Connecticut's other school choice programs? With regional **magnet schools receiving over \$6,000.00** per student, **charter schools receiving over \$8,500.00** per student and **vocational-technical schools fully funded at over \$11,000.00** per student, why are the **agriscience programs only receiving \$1,355.00 per student**? With the average high school cost per pupil being over \$11,000.00 and the maximum allowable tuition from sending towns being capped at \$7,992.00, we need more than a mere \$1,355.00 from the state to address the substantial shortfall in funding that currently must be absorbed by the operating district. **I want to stress that this bill is NOT asking** for funding equal to or even closely approaching the levels provided for magnets, charters and vo-tech schools. This bill is asking for the current \$1,355.00 grant to be increased to \$2,500.00, which will help close the gap between actual costs of the operating high school and the tuition payments received from sending towns. This bill will also provide funding relief for all 169 sending towns to reimburse some of the transportation costs when these towns

send students to the nearest agriscience program. Currently, these towns have to pay for this extra transportation with no help from the state.

I feel this **inequity in funding has been overlooked in the past 13 years** and it is time to consider this reasonable request to properly fund these successful programs that are located in Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Glastonbury, Woodbury, Falls Village, Winsted, Killingly, Ledyard, Lebanon, Wallingford, Middletown, New Haven, Rockville, Storrs, Southington, Suffield, Trumbull, Stamford and Litchfield.

When I was selected as the **2004 Connecticut Teacher of the Year**, it was the first time an agriscience teacher was selected in the history of the Teacher of the Year program. During that year, my favorite part of the journey was the opportunity to spread the word about what I call Connecticut's Best Kept Secret. The ultimate classic magnet school programs, our state's 19 regional agriscience programs. During that year, I spoke to several large groups of educators, citizens and taxpayers throughout the state. The best part of it was that, since I was the guest speaker, they had to listen to me! I can't tell you how many eyes I opened and many people came up to me later and said they had no idea these programs existed or that they never thought the **curriculum included floriculture, landscaping, turf grass management, forestry, food science, biotechnology, veterinary science, environmental science and horse management**, to name a few. They also couldn't believe that over **75% of our students continue their education in college**, and that over **one third of our students are in honors/AP courses**, or that our state-mandated five year graduate surveys consistently show that **60 to 70% of the respondents are now employed in agriculture or related occupations** five years after graduation. Or that the state's agriscience program **enrollment is at an all-time high of over 3,000** students across Connecticut, with **waiting lists of students wanting to enroll**.

The latest buzz in Connecticut Education is the High School Reform Initiative being discussed throughout the state. It is interesting to note that, in a majority of that initiative's recommendations, our agriscience programs are already accomplishing what the state wants all high schools to accomplish: Students have a defined career path throughout high school, students gain real-life experience in their chosen career field while still in high school, students have a one on one teacher mentor who works closely with that student for all four years in high school, and that through the FFA, these students learn the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, or soft skill, such as leadership, public speaking, team work, developing a work ethic, interviewing skills and others that the business industry is looking for from all high school graduates as their potential employees. On behalf of the 3,000 current agriscience students and the thousands of future students who will be making your flower arrangements, mowing your lawns, grooming your dogs, maintaining your golf courses, providing veterinary care to your pets, designing your landscapes, and producing your food, I ask that you fully support Bill #5869 which will provide drastically needed funding for the state's successful agriscience programs. Thank you for your time.

William Davenport, Director

2004 Connecticut Teacher of the Year

Agriscience and Technology Teacher, Ellis Clark Regional Agriscience and Technology Program,  
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### School Choice Funding Comparison, FY08

	State Support of operating costs	Transportation Costs Reimbursed by State	Sending Town Tuition
Vo-Ag	\$1355	Yes, as part of the School transportation grant	\$7,992
RESC Operated Magnet	\$7060 FY08 \$7620 FY09	Yes, reimbursed by state up to \$1300 per student**	Tuition varies by RESC, school enrollment, ECS foundation range from \$1000 - \$6000 approx.
Host Magnet	\$6016 FY08 \$6730 FY09	Yes, reimbursed by state up to \$1300 per student**	Most do not have to pay tuition
Charter Schools	\$8650 FY08 \$9300 FY09	Yes, as part of the school transportation grant	None
VoTech	Fully funded by State	Yes, as part of the School transportation grant	None
Open Choice	\$2500 per student grant to receiving district; if a receiving district accepts 10+ out-of-district students are eligible for up to \$500,000 grant	\$3250 per student	

\*\* THIS REIMBURSEMENT GOES TO THE TRANSPORTING RESC OR DISTRICT CLAIMING THE EXPENDITURES. THE COSTS OVER THE MAGNET TRANSP GRANT AMOUNT ARE COVERED UNDER THE DISTRICT'S REGULAR TRANSPORTATION GRANT WHICH REIMBURSES ON A PERCENTAGE BASIS.

## STATE APPROPRIATIONS FOR SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

(SDE: 2005-2007 Biennial Budget for State Education Grants)

<u>Program</u>	<u>2004-2005</u>	<u>2005-2006</u>	<u>2006-2007</u>	<u>2007-08</u>
<u>Magnet Schools</u>	\$67,590,817.00	\$85,517,972.00	\$94,977,889.00	
(per student grant)	(n/a)	(\$6,250.00/student)	(\$6,500.00/student)	<u>\$6,016.00/student</u>
<u>Charter Schools</u>	\$19,732,160.00	\$22,469,000.00	\$23,840,500.00	
(per student grant)	(\$7,250.00/student)	(\$7,625.00/student)	(\$8,000.00/student)	<u>\$8,650.00/student</u>
<u>Vo-Ag Schools</u>	\$ 2,288,578.00	\$ 2,288,578.00	\$ 2,288,578.00	
(per student grant)	(\$789.00/student)	(\$775.00/student)	(\$762.00/student)	<u>\$1,355.00/student</u>
	(2,899 students)	(2,950 students)	(3,000+ students)	
<u>Vo-Tech Schools</u>	Has always been fully funded by the state, currently at a rate of <u>over \$11,000.00 per student</u>			

Vo-Ag enrollment has increased by 48% over the past 10 years, with substantial waiting lists

2002	2,704 students
2003	2,788 students
2004	2,899 students
2005	2,950 students
2006	3,000+ students

Connecticut's regional agriscience (vo-ag) programs are located in:

New Haven	Woodbury	Storrs	Wallingford
Bridgeport	Rockville	Killingly	Bloomfield
Stamford	Suffield	Lebanon	Middletown
Falls Village	Glastonbury	Ledyard	Litchfield
Winsted	Trumbull	Southington	

**HOWEVER, the 3,000+ students enrolled come from  
all 169 towns and cities in Connecticut!**